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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: IRAQI GOVERNMENT, CONSTITUTION,

REFERENDUM, NATIONAL RECONCILIATION; BAGHDAD

SUMMARY: Discussion on the Constitution, Referendum, and National Reconciliation were the major editorial themes of the daily newspapers on October 17, 2005. END SUMMARY.

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SELECTED COMMENTARIES

[Editor's note: due to the four-day national referendum holiday, Iraqi newspapers are in limited production; only one (Al-Adala) has resumed publication today]

- [1](#)A. "Iraq Between Two Constitutions: Regardless of Results" (Asharq Al-Awsat, London-based, independent, Saudi owned, published this page-ten editorial by Jabber Habib Jabber)

"When I was still a student at the Faculty of Law & Politics, I remember a Moroccan colleague of mine asking me who Saddam's successor, following his death, would be. In fact, I could not speak about that issue because it would have caused problems for me and for that reason I told him to ask the relevant professor. Today, I remember that event when I see how media outlets and TV news channels freely discuss constitutional issues without any fear of retribution from the government.

"Some Pan-Arab channels have dedicated themselves to speaking out against the Iraqi constitution and have tried to illustrate that it was drafted by the Americans; some channels described those who drafted the Iraqi constitution as traitors and collaborators. However, those who criticize the current Iraqi constitution must know that this constitution was drafted for a country that is characterized by diversity and this constitution moves Iraq from disharmony to harmony.

"This constitution was drafted on the ruins of a dictatorial regime that has distorted Iraqi identity. The current Iraqi constitution respects Shariah while respecting and applying democracy and human rights. This constitution, on which Iraqis voted, represents the seventh constitution in Iraq's history. It seems that this constitution and the first one in 1925, are the only two Iraqi constitutions that were drafted by an elected assembly while all others were written by rulers. It is interesting that these two constitutions were drafted under occupation; this first under British occupation and the current one under American occupation.

"Usually constitutions are drafted by rulers, an elected assembly or through a public referendum. The current constitution allows any three provinces to reject it, giving the minority the right of veto. In fact, it has even given rights to small minorities to reject the constitution. I do not think there is any former constitution that has given the Iraqi people the same guarantees and rights as the current constitution. We know that even the United States' constitution allowed up to six states to reject it and that was during a time when the United States was comprised of only thirteen states.

"The Americans have been hopeful that the Sunni Arabs would join the political process through their participation in the drafting of the constitution to ensure its success. For this reason, the recent American move has caused dissenting Iraqi politicians to become more flexible and make compromises to Sunni Arabs in order to achieve national consensus.

"I think that the chances of the constitution's rejection are improbable. However if this happens, armed groups in

Iraq will think that they are able to disrupt the political process. In addition, these groups will believe that they have popular support and rejection of the constitution will increase sectarianism in the political process and this will cause those who made compromises to retract them. Amid hope for the future, Iraqis went out to vote in order to build their costly democracy."

1B. "Significant Step and Huge Accomplishment"

(Al-Adala, affiliated with SCIRI led by Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim, published this page-three editorial by Dr. Ali Khalif)

"Iraqis went out on October 15 armed with a challenge and a hope that a shining future would be realized through a new constitution. It was a big day filled with happiness while Iraqis decided to leave everything behind and to choose their way forward, by themselves, and announced their approval for the constitution as a gateway to progress towards democracy and freedom.

"Regardless of a positive or negative outcome, what we have seen on the great referendum day is the happiness that has appeared on the faces of Iraqi voters while they were walking long distances to go to polling centers to cast their votes. The fact that no one can deny or hide is that Iraqis have defeated the terrorists.

"Whatever we say about the referendum day is not an exaggeration because this day has broken the backs of terrorists and their supporters. Those who had bet on the failure of the political process and the government should reconsider their positions.

"What Iraqis have registered through their votes has emphasized a real willingness in practicing the democratic process. However, what Iraqis have achieved would never have happened unless there were sacrifices by the people and their friends [Coalition Forces] who helped in practicing this democratic process. Therefore, the blood of freedom has been mixed [between Iraqis and Coalition Forces]. Many victims have fallen in Iraq in order to establish freedom and democracy for all Iraqis.

"The most marvelous thing from the referendum is that voters cast their votes freely without any pressure. The era of dictatorship and tyranny is over, and it is now time for freedom and democracy to prevail in the new Iraq."

1C. "Rice Announces Results Before the Vote Count"

(Al-Quds Al-Arabi, independent, Palestinian owned, London-based anti-coalition published this page nineteen unattributed editorial)

"The U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced the results of Iraqi voting on the draft constitution, even before the IECI had given its account, when she commented in London that the Iraqi people had likely approved the constitution.

"These statements mean that the U.S. administration is determined to go forward with its political process in Iraq and that all measures have been taken to pass the constitution regardless of the results of voting. What needs to be closely monitored in the coming days is the announcement of final results of the referendum-particularly the percentages from the four majority Sunni provinces.

"The U.S. administration made a clever move by rejecting the TNA amendment to the election law ensuring that the voting process would be honest and announcing it would be committed regardless of the outcome of the referendum.

"According to Saleh Al-Mutlak, the spokesman for the [Sunni] National Dialogue Council, 'The monitors at the voting sites said Iraqis gave a strong 'No' for the constitution that aims to divide Iraq and alienate people from their surroundings.'

"The primary results reported that Sunnis voted 'No' (by more than 70%) in Salahadin and Al-Anbar provinces, but the 'Yes' percentage in Mosul province reached 70%, meaning the rejecters may not reach numbers necessary to reject the constitution. The new constitution, whether approved or not, is considered a recipe for sedition in Iraq, it enhances sectarianism and psychological division among the people of Iraq.

"President Bush praised the voting process, and he is right in that, because what he is trying to impose in Iraq serves his agenda; not Iraqi's national agenda. The U.S. wants to prove that the political process is working well in Iraq and that the upcoming elections are proof of democracy, while the reality on the ground is totally different. Car bombs, the lack of security or water, power shortages, and the Iraqi government's retreat to the Green Zone are all examples of that reality."

1D. "Now.Towards Reconciliation"

(Al-Hayat, London-based, independent, Saudi owned, published this page-nine editorial by Deputy Editor Abdul Wahab Badrkhan)

"There was a rush by the U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and some other European officials in their statements concerning the referendum on the Iraqi constitution. Rice spoke about the matter as if she knew the result of the referendum in advance. It seems that she knows that the result will be so positive that the U.S. administration will be able to think for awhile about how to celebrate the new victory in Iraq.

"The primary results have shown that Salahadin and Al-Anbar have totally rejected the constitution. At the same time, there is a percentage of rejection in other provinces. This percentage of rejection must be carefully analyzed. We know that the overwhelming majority will settle the fate of the constitution. However, the previously unsettled disagreements about the constitution will force politicians to make amendments to the document.

"It was clear that this constitution was aimed to make a specific move in Iraq although this country is not yet ready for one. For this reason, the idea of national reconciliation was presented again but hasn't been implemented because those who drafted the constitution have refused the idea of national reconciliation from the beginning and continue to reject this idea. They think that by rejecting it they will be able to exploit the current chaos in Iraq to implement their agendas. The Secretary General of Arab League, Amr Musa, has made reconciliation his purpose for visiting Baghdad. This visit comes at an appropriate time although some Iraqi groups believe it's too late.

"We had hoped that the drafting of the constitution would be a type of reconciliation conference which we thought would encourage Iraqis to discuss their future. But, this hasn't happened and we hope that, at the very least, the proposed constitution will unite the country. However, this also has not happened. In fact, this constitution weakens the central government at the expense of territories and provinces. It also puts national resources under the control of specific areas at the expense of the country as a whole. It was obvious that this constitution is appropriate for a divided rather than united country.

"The Chairman of the Iraqi Center for Development and National Dialogue, Mahdi Al-Hafuz, has done well when he called for holding a conference for national reconciliation and unity. This conference will support and legitimize the Arab League's delegation to Iraq. The Iraqi government should have called for holding such a conference rather than saying that Iraqis do not need reconciliation. Those who call for holding such a conference today look for a united political statement that can save the country. Their goal is to restore and reinforce national unity through inclusive national dialogue. We do not know if this conference will succeed; but I think it is on time because all hopes of reaching national agreement through the constitution are gone."

KHALILZAD